



## GROWTH AREAS

### Introduction

In 1998, the State of Arizona passed the Growing Smarter Act to ensure the wise management of growth and protect our state's natural heritage. Among other elements, Maricopa County is now required to include a plan for growth areas. Specifically, Maricopa County must identify those areas, if any, that are particularly suitable for planned multi-modal transportation and infrastructure expansion and improvements designed to support a planned concentration of a variety of land uses. This includes residential, office/employment, commercial, tourism, and industrial uses. This mixed use planning must include policies and strategies designed to:

- ◆ Make automobile, transit, and other multi-modal circulation more efficient
- ◆ Make infrastructure expansion more economical
- ◆ Provide for rational land development patterns
- ◆ Conserve significant natural resources and open space areas within growth areas, and coordinate their location to similar areas outside of growth areas
- ◆ Promote timely and financially sound infrastructure expansion

The Growth Areas element is important because it allows Maricopa County to accommodate growth in an orderly and fiscally responsible manner that is sensitive to the natural environment and residents' quality of life. This type of growth will keep Maricopa County economically, socially, and environmentally successful. For a County perspective on growth areas, refer to the *Eye to the Future 2020* Growth Areas element. Although there are fewer opportunities to plan for urban growth areas in rural county areas, it is still important to plan for and anticipate growth in these areas.

### Development Pattern Analysis

#### *Past*

An early history of the Rio Verde Foothills region is described in the Introduction section. In 1978, Maricopa County began collecting data for the first Desert Foothills Policy & Development Guide. Demographic research for this first area plan includes population figures dating back to 1960 when there were an estimated 450 residents in the original 323 square mile planning area. By 1980, this fast growing area grew to almost 9,300 people.

The updated Rio Verde Foothills planning area covers approximately 20 square miles of unincorporated private land. In 1990, there were only 33 people living in



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the planning area. By 2000, the population had increased to 778. Until recently, the planning area experienced little growth or development. Isolated ranching operations were the only activity in this region until the 1980s, when a few homes and equestrian ranches began to appear.

In the 1960s, over 6,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land were exchanged to develop what is now Fountain Hills. The Fountain Hills masterplan was approved in 1970 and encompassed 12,000 acres south of McDowell Mountain Park. Prior to 1960, land in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area was under USFS management. Between 1960 and 1971, this area became private land after a series of USFS land exchanges. These exchanges are outlined on page 13 in the land use element.

USFS land exchanges also provided private land at the edge of the Tonto National Forest for development by the Rio Verde and Tonto Verde developments. The original Rio Verde masterplan was approved in 1971, but sales did not begin until 1974. Tonto Verde, an extension of Rio Verde, was approved in 1994.

### *Present*

Today, Maricopa County is one of the fastest growing counties in the United States. In addition, with a current population of over 3 million residents it is also one of the largest. Growth continues throughout Maricopa County in both incorporated and unincorporated areas. Over the last couple of decades, much of the growth in unincorporated Maricopa County occurred in the southeast, the far northeast, and the near northwest portions of the Phoenix metropolitan area. Maricopa County also has several large-scale master planned communities. These Development Master Plans (DMPs) tend to be large, self-sustaining communities with mixed land uses. Vista Verde DMP, within the planning area, was approved in April 2001.

Scottsdale began developing several nearby golf course communities in the mid-1980s. Should the McDowell Sonoran Preserve be permanently conserved as planned, the Sonoran desert west of the planning area will remain mostly undeveloped. The Troon North development at Alma School Parkway (110<sup>th</sup> Street) and the Golf Club of Scottsdale (golf course only) at 122<sup>nd</sup> Street were built in the last 10 years. Also, the 273-acre Scottsdale National property (annexed by Scottsdale) east of 136<sup>th</sup> Street will be developed in the future.

### *Future*

Given its strong economy, mild climate, and quality of life, Maricopa County is expected to continue growing rapidly over the next several decades. Whereas it took Maricopa County over 100 years to reach approximately 3 million in population, DES projections show population rising to approximately 4.5 million by 2020, and



more than doubling to 7 million over the next 50 years. Development over the next 20 years will continue to shift from southeast Maricopa County to areas in the southwest, west, and north portions of the metropolitan area. Growth is also expected along existing and new transportation facilities. This includes Interstate highways (I-10 and I-17), as well as the expanded metropolitan freeway system (Loop 101, Loop 202, Loop 303, and U.S. 60).

Population growth is influenced by many variables. The primary limitation in the planning area is water availability. Assuming that groundwater will continue to be extracted through private wells and possibly a water improvement district, growth can reasonably be expected to continue as it has over the last five years. By 2020, the Rio Verde Foothills planning area could have a population of approximately 6,700.

## **Projected Population and Land Use: Rio Verde Foothills**

Using historic building permit data, future population projections for the Rio Verde Foothills planning area are established by deriving approximate estimates from known data. Calculations for land absorption do not include the Scottsdale National or Vista Verde DMP area. To determine projected population and land use for the planning area, several assumptions were made:

- ◆ 5-year growth rate of 117 new homes per year (consistent with average planning area increase from 1999 to 2003)
- ◆ 2.45 persons per occupied household (per MAG projections, in study area)
- ◆ One household equates to a single dwelling unit
- ◆ Average residential density per gross acre equals 1.0 dwelling unit (typical)
- ◆ 8 acres per 1,000 population for commercial land use (typical)
- ◆ 8 acres per 1,000 population for industrial land use (per Maricopa County Subdivision Regulations-Administrative Guidelines, 1990)

### *Residential Demand*

The Rio Verde Foothills planning area had a population of approximately 1,800 in January 2004. Assuming a continuance of the recent growth rate, the planning area will increase to approximately 6,700 persons by the year 2020. At 2.45 persons per household, the planning area could add approximately 2,000 dwelling units over the next 20 years. Based on one dwelling unit per acre, this equates to approximately 2,000 acres of additional land needed to accommodate future residential development through the year 2020. This can be accommodated by the amount of land currently under private ownership (13,260 acres in the entire planning area).



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Not including the Scottsdale National property or the Vista Verde DMP area, there are 16 sections (10,240 acres) of land zoned Rural-43, and two sections (1,280 acres) zoned Rural-190. Based on this zoning, over 8,400 lots could theoretically be created at build-out, if land division continued indefinitely. If both sections zoned Rural-190 were allowed to be rezoned to Rural-43, an additional 790 lots could theoretically be created. Two sections zoned Rural-190 could yield 234 lots, whereas two sections zoned Rural-43 could yield 1,024 lots. These buildout calculations include subtracting an average of 20% of the land area for easements typically required when creating new lots. These buildout scenarios are unlikely to occur because of geographic, environmental, water supply, and other limitations.

The planning area is unique in being surrounded by dedicated open space on most of its borders. Considering the geographic location, the unknown status of water availability, distance from existing services, and the desire of the community to maintain rural residential densities, there is little potential for increased residential densities. Scattered rural residential development will likely continue at a moderate rate in the planning area.

### *Commercial Demand*

Research indicates that a majority of residents and landowners in the planning area are opposed to commercial development in this area. Also, typical land absorption calculations do not always apply in rural areas. However, in order to address the Growth Areas element, commercial demand will be calculated for hypothetical purposes.

Estimated commercial land use demand is based on projected resident population increase. Based on a projected 6,700 planning area residents by the year 2020 and the commercial land use ratio listed above, it is estimated that a minimum of 54 acres of commercial land would be needed to support the population after 2020. Historically, there has been very little demand for commercial uses in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area other than special use permits for equestrian facilities, which do not require commercial zoning. With commercial nodes at Alma School Road and other locations in north Scottsdale and a small store located in Rio Verde, the majority of residents would prefer to shop outside of the planning area and exclude any commercial development in the area. Depending on future population growth, this could be feasible for the next 10 to 15 years. At present, no commercially zoned property exists in the planning area.

### *Industrial Demand*

Public comments indicate that industrial-type uses are strongly opposed and would not be appropriate in the planning area. Rural areas do not necessarily have the same demand for urban industrial uses. Demand for industrial land is calculated



using the same method as commercial land. Based on a year 2020 resident population of 6,700, a minimum of 54 acres of industrial land would be required. At present, there is no industrial zoned property in the planning area. The closest industrial zoned land is near the Scottsdale Municipal Airport, approximately 15 driving miles from the planning area.

When commercial and industrial land use needs are combined with residential land use needs, the Rio Verde Foothills planning area would theoretically support approximately 2,110 additional acres of land for growth and development. It is important to note that these numbers should be used as a guide rather than definitive criteria. Various factors, such as changing annexation patterns, economic conditions, demographic conditions, and land use patterns can alter population growth and demands in the planning area.

## **Growth Areas Issues and Considerations**

Included in this section is an overview of growth-related issues identified during the public participation process. Also included is a review of some potential physical, built, and jurisdictional considerations that may affect future growth and development patterns.

### *Growth Area Issues*

Stakeholders involved in the planning process were very helpful in identifying a variety of growth-related issues and concerns. A list of some of the more frequently identified local concerns is included below.

- ◆ Limit residential growth to one dwelling unit per acre maximum (recommendations ranged from 1 to 5-acre minimum lot sizes).
- ◆ Limit subdivision development.
- ◆ Discourage commercial/business/industrial development (majority opinion); or, want commercial/business developments limited to Rio Verde Drive only.
- ◆ Encourage businesses to locate at Alma School Road/Dynamite Boulevard in Scottsdale.
- ◆ Concern about impacts of development on water availability, air quality; and plants and wildlife.
- ◆ Do not want to be annexed into Scottsdale.
- ◆ Coordinate information and existing policies between Maricopa County agencies.

### *Growth Area Considerations*

Besides public attitudes about growth, there are also potential natural, built, and ownership constraints to growth. While not necessarily a complete list, this section presents a brief overview of some of these possible constraints.





## Physical Considerations

### *Topography*

The planning area is a gently sloped desert valley surrounded by rugged terrain on the north and south, a series of small hills on the west, and the Verde River on the east. Slopes generally range from zero to approximately three percent. Due to the rugged surrounding topography and inaccessible park and forest land, the planning area can only be accessed from the Phoenix area from the east or west side of the McDowell Mountains. There is no direct access from the north or south. Numerous unnamed washes, which can constrain development, run toward the Verde River.

Maricopa County encourages preservation of significant slope areas, especially those above 15%. For areas over 15% slope, the Maricopa County Zoning Ordinance provides guidelines for development to protect public health, safety, and welfare, and to minimize the impacts to the existing character of such areas. Asher Hills appears to contain the only slopes exceeding 15%.

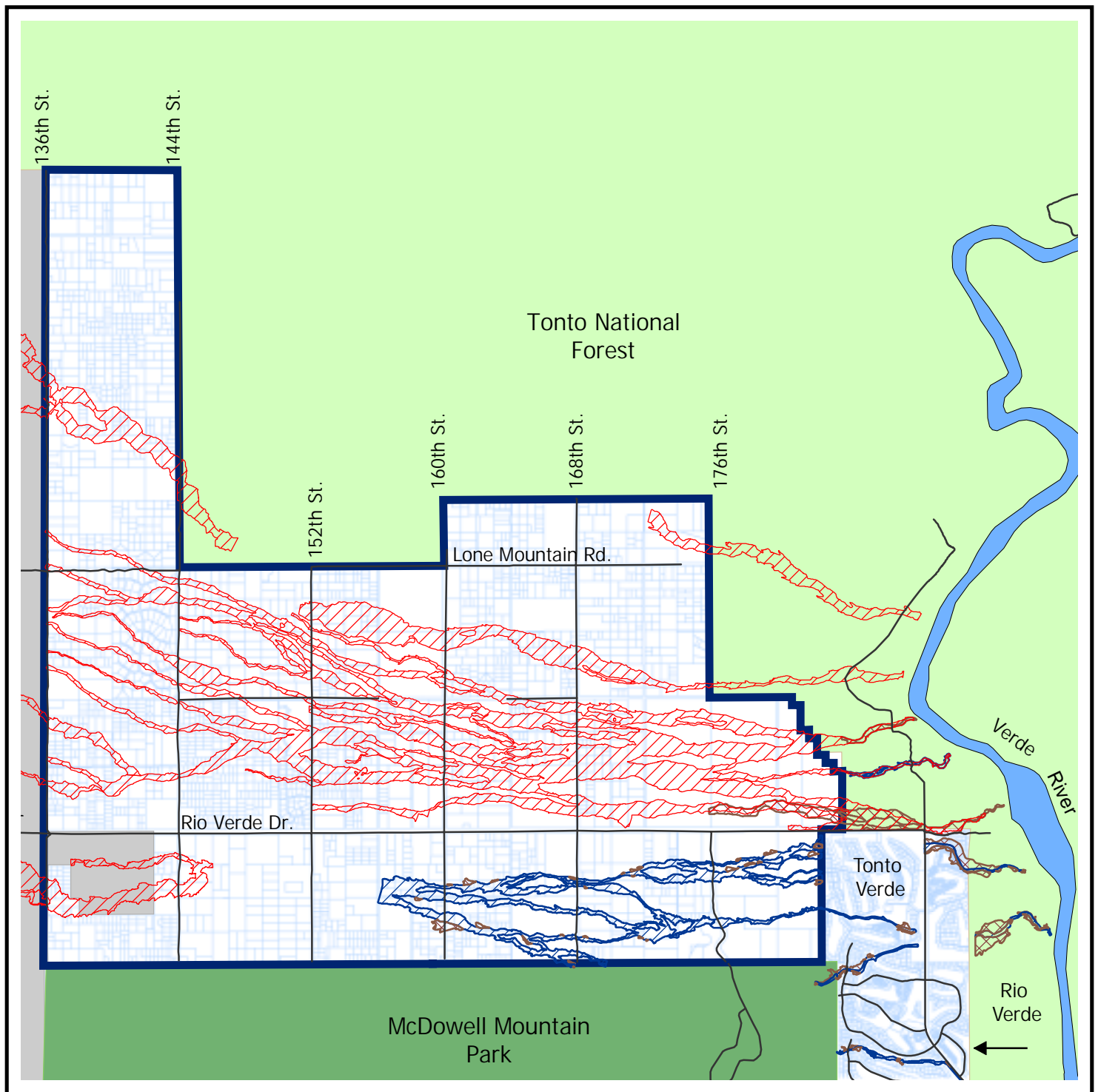
### *Floodplains*

Floodplains are areas that are susceptible to flooding during significant rain events. The most common delineation is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year floodplain. The 100-year flood is defined as the flood level having a 1% chance of occurring within a year. It is important to note that the 100-year flood may occur more often than once every 100 years, and that it is not the maximum flood that can occur along a waterway.

**Figure 12-Floodplains** identifies floodplains in the Rio Verde Foothills study area. The FCDMC conducted floodplain studies south of Rio Verde Drive that were approved by FEMA in 1995. South of Rio Verde Drive, there are approximately 341 acres of land in the 100-year FEMA floodplain. Nineteen of those acres are within the 100-year FEMA floodway fringe, areas adjacent to the floodway where encroachment may be permitted. The remaining 322 acres are located within the floodway, which is a more hazardous area of the floodplain that has restrictions on the type of development that can occur. Only limited private and recreational uses are allowed within a floodway. Some examples of allowed uses within a floodway (subject to obtaining a floodplain use permit) include sand and gravel operations, corrals and shade structures, golf courses, picnic grounds, wildlife preserves, farming, parking and loading areas, and hiking trails. Buildings are not permitted within the floodway.<sup>16</sup> *Eye to the Future 2020* contains policies that discourage development within the entire area of the 100-year floodplain.

The FCDMC recently identified preliminary floodplain areas for the land north of

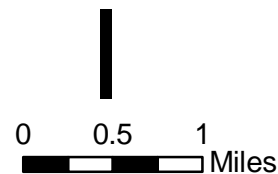
<sup>16</sup> Floodplain Regulations for Maricopa County. Flood Control District of Maricopa County, 2000



## Floodplains

Figure 12

- Arterial
- Planning Area Boundary
- Incorporated Area
- Parcels
- Tonto National Forest
- McDowell Mountain Park
- \* Preliminary Floodplains (subject to change)
- ▨ 100-year floodplain (AE)
- \* Floodplains Approved by FEMA (studies continuing)
- ▨ Floodway (FW)
- ▨ Floodfringe (AE)



\* Contact the Flood Control District of Maricopa County for latest floodplain information.





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Rio Verde Drive. Detailed studies are continuing for the area. According to FCDMC maps, approximately 1,900 acres are within the 100-year floodplain. This area is equal to roughly 15 percent of the planning area. Drainage guidelines developed for the Rio Verde Area Drainage Master Plan are discussed in the Open Space element on page 71.

## *Subsidence and Earth Fissures*

In areas where extensive pumping has significantly lowered groundwater levels, subsidence and cracking of the land surface can occur. Groundwater depletion can make it economically infeasible to pump water in some cases. Land subsidence and earth fissuring have been documented in certain portions of Maricopa County and have caused water quality problems, flooding, damage to well casings and building foundations. No land subsidence or fissures have been documented in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area.

## *Water Supply*

Water in the planning area comes from groundwater sources. The planning area is located in the Fountain Hills subbasin, where water quantities have not been established. Groundwater supply and depth varies widely throughout the planning area. Test wells must be drilled to establish the depth and quantity of groundwater. In general, wells have been more successful producing water in the western half of the planning area than in the eastern half.

Currently, individual wells are the largest users of groundwater in the planning area. In 2003, approximately 570 acre-feet of groundwater was withdrawn by all users, and projections for 2020 indicate that over 2,100 acre-feet could be pumped, not including the Vista Verde development. The major determinant of groundwater pumping will be availability and whether a domestic water improvement district is eventually formed.

Colorado River water is not available in the planning area, nor will it be in the foreseeable future due to cost and distance from distribution facilities. The Scottsdale City Council did not show any interest in annexing this area in the 1990s and this lack of interest was due, at least in part, to the lack of guaranteed surface water supply to serve any newly annexed area. Most planning area residents are not interested in being annexed. As such, it is unlikely that water will be provided by Scottsdale in the next 10 to 15 years. Although the Verde River is just over a mile away, legal rights would have to be established to divert any water from the Verde. A more in-depth discussion of water supply is found in the Water Resources element.

## *Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat*

The Rio Verde Foothills planning area currently contains abundant open space,



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which supports a large variety of animals and plants. Located in the Sonoran Desert, two general types of native plant communities are represented. The Palo Verde-Saguaro community, also known as “Upper Sonoran” vegetation, is found throughout the planning area and is the most scenic of the Sonoran Desert plant communities. The Mixed Riparian Scrub habitat is found along washes in the planning area. Citizens have expressed the strong desire to protect the native vegetation and wildlife found throughout the planning area by maintaining low-density residential development and through sensitive development practices.

A variety of federal and state laws that protect biological resources help govern development. This includes the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Arizona Native Plant law. A more complete discussion of vegetation and wildlife is found in the *Environmental Effects* element report of this area plan.

### Built Considerations

#### *Infrastructure and Services*

One of the principles of *Eye to the Future 2020* is ensuring that growth occurs in an orderly and fiscally responsible manner. This includes ensuring that necessary infrastructure and services such as roads, utilities, schools, police, fire, and medical facilities are available to meet the needs of future residents. The availability of infrastructure and services can dictate the type and timing of future development, particularly with urban development. This generally refers to residential densities greater than one dwelling unit per acre. This subject is discussed in more detail in the Cost of Development element.

For most development within the Rio Verde Foothills planning area, a full complement of facilities and services has not been required and is usually not expected, with the exception of adequate streets, flood control, law enforcement, and fire protection services. However, with the rapid increase in residential development over the last 10 years and continued development in the future, the planning area will face situations where water service is required and other facilities expected, depending on the character and magnitude of development. In the future, facilities such as community sewer, parks with playfields, sheriff's office, fire station, emergency clinic, and schools may be required to accommodate a growing population. A facilities standards table, which provides reference guidelines for determining necessary facilities, is provided in the *Land Use* section. Park and recreation facility standards are provided in this plan's *Open Space* section.

#### *Noise Generating Operations*

Careful consideration must also be given to noise generating operations. Significant and sustained noise can affect health, sleep, and learning patterns. Prolonged



exposure to loud noise can cause general community annoyance and possibly a reduction in property values.

The Rio Verde Foothills planning area can generally be characterized as a quiet, rural area. The primary sources of noise are vehicular traffic, occasional flyovers by aircraft associated with Scottsdale Municipal Airport, and ATV use. Several residents identified dirt bikes and ATVs as a source of irritating noise and have been known to spook horses, endangering riders.

## *Flood Control*

### FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT OF MARICOPA COUNTY

The location of existing and future flood control structures can impact the location and type of future development. While flood control structures minimize the impacts of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, they can also influence where specific development is appropriate. The FCDMC conducts comprehensive watershed studies throughout the County. Plans are then prepared based on hydraulic analyses, future land use development, and environmental considerations. The plans incorporate information provided by watershed studies and recommend specific, project-oriented solutions for flooding problems. FCDMC planning studies specific to the planning area are discussed in the Open Space element.

### MARICOPA COUNTY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT (MCP&D) DRAINAGE ADMINISTRATION

In 2005, the MCP&D Department assumed responsibility for drainage permitting, drainage inspection, development plan review, and enforcement. The FCDMC reviews plans for residential, single family, commercial, subdivisions, and industrial building for compliance with floodplain regulations. The MCP&D Department checks for compliance with design drainage guidelines and gives the applicant a drainage clearance.

## **Ownership Considerations**

Besides potential physical and built constraints, land ownership can also impact growth and development. All of the 20 square miles in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area are held in private ownership. This compares with approximately 29% private ownership in Maricopa County as a whole. The surrounding land, by contrast, is predominantly publicly owned.

Land along the west boundary of the planning area is managed by the State of Arizona; land along the north boundary is managed by the Federal government (Tonto National Forest); and land along the south boundary is managed by Maricopa County (McDowell Mountain Park). The only privately owned land adjacent to the



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planning area is a section of private land at the southwest corner of Rio Verde Drive and 136<sup>th</sup> Street, and a section of land at the southeast corner of Rio Verde Drive and 184<sup>th</sup> Street. A brief overview of land ownership is included below.

### *Federal*

The USFS manages the Tonto National Forest, located north and east of the planning area. The USFS has authority under a number of statutes, when it is in the public interest, to exchange lands with non-federal parties within the boundaries of National Forests within a state. In the past, the USFS has traded lands along the Tonto National Forest border, including land that is now the Rio Verde Foothills planning area, and the Rio Verde and Tonto Verde communities, for tracts of private property within USFS boundaries.

### *State*

The State of Arizona manages thousands of acres of Trust land west of the planning area. Under state charter, the Arizona State Land Department has the responsibility on behalf of beneficiaries to assure the highest and best use of the Trust lands. The Federal Enabling Act and state constitution mandate that fair market value be obtained from all Trust land transactions, which include sales and commercial leasing. This typically results in the sale and development of state-owned land.

In 1996, the state legislature enacted the Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) to give the Land Department authority to reclassify, lease, and sell state trust lands in and around urban areas to local governments and nonprofit organizations as open space for conservation purposes. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve plan, adopted by the City of Scottsdale, is planned to preserve most of this state trust land. The total land area proposed for the preserve is 36,400 acres. Scottsdale voters decided on May 18, 2004 to approve a sales-tax increase to fund further acquisition of the preserve.

### *Maricopa County*

Maricopa County manages McDowell Mountain Regional Park, which abuts the southern boundary of the planning area. Maricopa County controls access to its parks and often requires user fees. The Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department does not have plans to acquire any more land in this region of the county. Planning area residents have non-motorized access to the park at 152<sup>nd</sup> Street and the Jomax Road alignment via a controlled opening. The main entrance station is off McDowell Mountain Road, on the east side of the park.



## Development Considerations: Conclusion

The potential constraints identified in this section will continue to affect the amount, type, and location of future development. Indeed, some of these constraints make development impossible, while others may only have a minimal effect. However, the combination of these potential constraints will continue to guide public and private decision makers in future land use decisions.

### *Growth Area Opportunities*

Based primarily on the need for services and infrastructure, Maricopa County's area plans typically identify where urban growth and development should occur over the next several years.

### *General Plan Development Areas*

The General Plan Development Area (GPDA) is unincorporated area that is likely to be annexed by a city or town in the future, and is therefore included in an adopted municipal general plan. These municipal general plans often provide specific recommendations for proposed land use. Future growth is encouraged within GPDAs for the reasons outlined in *Eye to the Future 2020 – Growth Areas Element*. The City of Scottsdale is the only city that borders the planning area. Scottsdale's general plan, as illustrated in **Figure 10**, does not include any land in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area, therefore the Rio Verde Foothills area is currently not in a GPDA.

Scottsdale's Conceptual Land Use Plan (last revised June 15, 2004) designates land west of 136<sup>th</sup> Street as "Natural Open Space" and "Rural Neighborhoods". Rural Neighborhoods are defined as areas of relatively large lot single-family neighborhoods with densities usually no more than one house per acre. Native desert vegetation predominates many areas and special care is required to preserve the area's open desert character and environmental features. The closest location of planned Suburban Neighborhoods is the Troon North community at Alma School Parkway and Dynamite Boulevard. Suburban Neighborhoods are defined as medium to small-lot single-family neighborhoods or subdivisions with densities usually more than one house per acre, but less than eight houses per acre. This category also includes some townhouses and can also be used for small lot single-family homes such as patio homes.

All of the land bordering the western side of the Rio Verde Foothills planning area was annexed by the City of Scottsdale in 1983 and 1984. In addition, the 273-acre Scottsdale National property at the southeast corner of Rio Verde Drive and 136<sup>th</sup> Street was annexed in 1990. In April 2004, the Scottsdale City Council approved a





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tentative agreement to allow 119 homes on the property. Once developed, this property will receive services and infrastructure from Scottsdale. However, there is no indication that Scottsdale will annex any additional land in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area. Future growth area opportunities appear to be concentrated in the Scottsdale National community and the Troon North community, both located in the City of Scottsdale.

### *Urban Growth Opportunities in the Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan*

County area plans include areas that are generally located outside of a municipal general plan. Most county area plans contain some locations where urban growth opportunities exist. These locations of higher intensity use (i.e. commercial, industrial, mixed use, and residential density greater than 1 dwelling unit per acre) are typically selected based on municipal general plans, available services and infrastructure, and residents' input during the planning process. However, because the Rio Verde Foothills planning area is outside of the urban service area, no urban growth opportunities have been identified in the current area plan update. Considering this and that the majority of residents and landowners express a strong desire to maintain the existing rural nature of the community, the planning area is anticipated to continue to experience rural growth that is consistent with the underlying zoning for the current 10 to 15 year planning horizon.

Some requirements of the Growing Smarter law that relate to growth areas and may be implemented in this area plan are discussed below. In particular, the identification of areas that are potentially suitable for multi-modal transportation. Areas identified as General Plan Development Areas and growth areas are suitable for certain multi-modal transportation systems.

Although the Rio Verde Foothills planning area is more rural and isolated from urban growth than other parts of the Valley, development is occurring in and around the planning area. Two new subdivisions (Rio Mountain Estates and Granite Mountain Ranch) will add approximately 200 single-family homes in the west end of the planning area, with all lots exceeding one acre. Vista Verde DMP will add up to 842 residential units on 856 acres. Future residential development will generate greater traffic volumes. While an urban bus system would not be suitable for the area, it would be prudent to plan for appropriate future transit options that could reduce vehicle trips within the area. For example, a community circulator (using smaller neighborhood friendly vehicles) that includes routes to local stores, libraries, and hospitals could help reduce traffic volumes and pollution. Other potential multi-modal opportunities include bicycling, walking, and telecommuting as a replacement for vehicle trips. Given the current popularity of Rio Verde Drive as a bicycle route, improvements to this route will be an important element of the





multi-modal system for this area. Safe and efficient biking and walking routes will be especially important in the future if a local school(s) is built within the planning area.

The Growth Areas element encourages rational land development patterns that include a balance of employment and housing to improve transportation efficiency and reduce automobile travel. For rural communities outside of urban service areas, planning for employment is not always feasible, or may be premature. Currently, planning area residents prefer to commute to jobs outside the area, have home-based businesses, or operate equestrian-related operations on their properties. As described in the Land Use element, several properties have special use permits that allow riding and boarding stables, kennels, or special training facilities.

The Growing Smarter Law promotes conservation of significant natural resources and open space within growth areas, and encourages coordinating their location to similar areas outside of growth areas. Natural resource and open space planning in developing areas can have long-lasting effects on a community's quality of life and can minimize environmental impacts of development. Examples may include integrating open space areas such as major desert wash corridors into a regional open space plan. Also, environmentally sensitive techniques for site selection, site preparation, and construction contribute to long-term ecosystem health, quality of life, and increased land values.

## *Development Master Plans*

*Eye to the Future 2020* recognizes Development Master Plans (DMPs), also known as master planned communities, as a preferred type of development because of the opportunity to provide mixed land uses. Historically, DMPs have been allowed throughout Maricopa County. As such, Maricopa County will continue to evaluate DMPs on an individual basis to determine if they provide mixed use, multi-modal development opportunities, and that they either have or will provide the necessary infrastructure and services to support urban type development.

The Vista Verde Development Master Plan was approved in February 2000. Located in the eastern end of the planning area about one mile north of Rio Verde, the development is essentially an extension of the Rio Verde and Tonto Verde communities. Rio Verde Utilities will extend water and sewer services north to serve the new 856-acre site. The applicant has indicated that all sewer and water improvements will be done with private funds. Electricity will be provided by Salt River Project and telephone by Qwest. Since this is planned to be an age-restricted community, there will not be any impacts to the school system. Fire protection and



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emergency medical services will be supplied by Rural Metro, which currently has a station with a fire truck and paramedics located in Rio Verde. The nearest Sheriff substation is located in Fountain Hills, with a response time of approximately 20 minutes. Most of the land use is planned to be Large Lot Residential, with approximately 35 acres Small Lot Residential, and a 9.5-acre parcel designated as Neighborhood Retail Center to accommodate a clubhouse, community center, dining establishment, and golf shop.

### **Growth Area Opportunities: Conclusion**

With the recognition of General Plan Development Areas, specific locations within County Area Plans, and mixed use DMPs as growth opportunities, Maricopa County reaffirms its commitment to orderly and fiscally responsible growth that is consistent with requirements of the Growing Smarter law. While planning for future growth, Maricopa County will continue its long-standing policy of coordination and cooperation with incorporated municipalities.

Opportunities for urban style growth are not identified in the Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan. However, any future rural subdivisions or DMP proposals will still be evaluated on an individual basis in concert with the potential constraints noted in this report. Also, because the areas best suited for mixed use and multi-modal urban growth will continue to change, Maricopa County will periodically review these growth areas and make changes to them as necessary.

Although significant growth is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, where and when growth occurs is determined by a variety of factors. Both physical and built features can impact growth, as can land ownership and existing infrastructure. Public opinions regarding growth and development will also continue to be important in determining growth patterns.